

Resource Family Recruitment and Retention

Our partnership with foster and adopt parents, our resource families, is a focal point in creating the strategies to make our vision of safety, permanency and family engagement a reality in the field. Resource families have one of the most important roles in child welfare; they care for the children. They also carry an important link in helping children in their care maintain connections with parents, kin and communities from which the children come. Resource parents are natural mentors and teachers; our partnership with them as care providers must honor their roles as mentors and team members in caring for the child and helping the team move ahead toward a positive permanency, reunification or emancipation outcome for the children.

We face challenges in reaching our outcome of a full partnership with resource parents that fully supports our work to keep children safe and in stable and permanent homes. These include: creating a teamwork relationship between resource parents and social workers; and finding ways to recruit, license, retain and provide support for resource families. Achieving the goal of strengthening our relationship and partnership with resource parents will require these major strategies:

- Creating a Request for Proposal (RFP) to find providers to implement strategies across the state, enhanced resource family recruitment, retention and support. This will give multiple vendors and providers an opportunity to bid competitively for the services we need in order to assure outcomes in recruitment and retention are achieved, and to build and enhance local support systems for resource parents in each region. This is also responsive to our goal to focus on communities, neighborhoods, places to recruit (e.g. schools), and specialized recruitment initiatives for specific children and groups of children in our care.
- Initiating after-hours (24 hour) crisis support lines for caregivers to assist them with the support and assistance they need during hours when they cannot access their foster care social worker. Another strategy will be to create policy that requires a quick phone call return when a foster parent needs assistance or to discuss a matter (24 hr. call-back goal).
- Inviting caregiver participation in all staffing and decision-making forums. This gives a clear indication to resource parents that they are members of the team and that we value and invite their participation at the table.
- Establishing a conflict resolution system to enhance communication by increasing problem solving opportunities and continuing open and direct communication between providers and child welfare staff. A number of new models are promising in providing guidance on how to negotiate and

talk through difficult conversation and situations. We will explore these strategies so that each region has a process for resolving conflict and maintaining good, productive working relationships.

- Developing tribal licensing processes. This will create more flexibility for tribal communities in deciding who and how they should license people, kin and non-kin to provide care, increasing options for child placement, and strengthen our government-to-government relationship with the tribes.
- Developing and maintaining regional plans for resource family recruitment. Creating and providing resources to support these plans will allow a region to recruit in communities where they need placement options for identified groups of children (i.e. older children, special needs children, children of color). This strategy will give regions the flexibility to recruit in response to placement data and community demographics (where children are living or enrolled in school) as well as in or at places in the community that provide the best recruitment sources, e.g. schools and/or community centers.
- Working together with each licensed provider to create annual assessment and development plans. These conversations will provide opportunities to talk with providers about training, skills, and assess how they are feeling about their role, the children in their home, and their work as a resource parent. It gives them an opportunity to express their needs as a parent for skill enhancement, respite, raise concerns, and voice other issues that impact their work with the child and the agency. Licensing workers will also be required by policy to make quarterly contact with resource parents to assess whether there are needs or concerns not being met.
- Hosting cross-training opportunities to build and enhance relationships between resource parents and social workers in an environment where they are learning together and discussing their common goals and mission in doing this work. Just having the opportunity to “have a chat” outside of the rigors of a daily schedule can create many opportunities for communication that underscore our common commitment to this work with children and families.

Finally, it is time to change our culture about how we view our partnership with resource parents. We cannot do our work and achieve the outcomes we seek without their help. They must be full partners in our process of assuring safety and permanency for children in our communities.